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SUBJECT: MDC MP COLTART ON PLANNED U.S. VISIT; REQUEST FOR
PRESIDENTIAL MEETING

REF: HARARE 1156

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

1. (C) MDC Shadow Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs David Coltart on August 25 told the CDA that together with Zimbabwean exiled businessmen Strive Masiyiwa and Nigel Chanakira, he was employing church connections in the United States to seek a meeting with President Bush in October. He planned to tell the President that change in Zimbabwe remained a real possibility in the short term and that the U.S. should continue assistance to civil society. Coltart said Parliament would likely pass the Constitutional Amendment Bill on August 30 and that he would personally be a prime target of new travel restrictions. He confirmed that the MDC opposed wider trade sanctions and IMF expulsion, but favored stepped up international pressure on the GOZ, including at the UN Security Council. End Summary.

Wants Meeting With the President

2. (C) Coltart told the CDA that he and two colleagues were seeking a Washington meeting with President Bush in October to discuss Zimbabwe. The two colleagues were Econet principal owner and former Daily News publisher Strive Masiyiwa and Kingdom Bank owner Nigel Chanakira. The three shared a common religious faith, and were seeking the meeting through their senior religious contacts in the U.S. rather than through official channels. The group might also seek meetings on Capitol Hill, especially if they failed to secure a meeting with the President. Coltart said the trip was intended to be low-key with no media profile and that he would not be meeting the President in his guise as an MDC politician but rather as a fellow believer.

3. (C) Coltart said the group's message to the President would be to match the USG's strong rhetoric on Zimbabwe with continued resources. The U.S. was cutting back on democracy assistance at exactly the wrong time. Change in Zimbabwe remained a very real prospect in the next two-three years and U.S. assistance was badly needed to get civil society and the opposition through the current difficult period.

Predicts Constitutional Reforms Passage

4. (C) Coltart said he expected Parliament to pass the GOZ's proposed constitutional amendments bill (reftel) on August 30. Of immediate potential impact to the MDC was the bill's restraint on travel by perceived regime enemies. He said ZANU-PF MPs had made clear during the debate over the bill that he would personally be one of the provision's principal and early victims. This could prevent his leaving Zimbabwe including to meet with the President but in that event his two colleagues would still make trip to Washington.

5. (C) Coltart added that the MDC had introduced its own proposal for constitutional amendments to point up the undemocratic nature of the bill. Among other things, the MDC proposal included a requirement that constitutional amendments be put to national referendum within two years of passage. Coltart also noted that the GOZ would likely conduct senate elections within three months of the bill's passage, notwithstanding its lack of budget for it. He reported that the MDC continued to debate whether or not to participate and had not reached a position.

MDC To Continue Legal Challenges

6. (C) Coltart said the MDC was continuing its campaign in the courts against GOZ and ruling party abuses. The cases

(which are funded in part by USAID) kept the spotlight on GOZ electoral abuses and underscored the MDC,s non-violence and respect for rule of law. The challenges also tied up GOZ resources; CIO operatives typically outnumbered MDC functionaries in court. The current focus of the court challenges was the 2002 presidential election. The MDC had pursued a two-part case. The first part had been 27 legal and constitutional challenges to the election's conduct. Had the courts found in the MDC,s favor the election result would have been null and void. However, in June 2004 the High Court had dismissed the MDC,s case (though without providing any reasoning). The MDC was now moving forward on the second part: establishing that the election had been fraudulent.

MDC Opposes IMF Expulsion But Wants UNSC Attention

17. (C) Coltart said Zimbabwe,s economic distress posed a dilemma for the MDC, which didn,t want the country to collapse and the suffering of common citizens to rise but did want to see the regime pay for its misrule. Accordingly, the party remained opposed to generalized trade sanctions but continued to support targeted sanctions on GOZ and ZANU-PF leaders. In addition, Coltart confirmed that the MDC opposed IMF expulsion but nonetheless hoped to see the international community, and especially the UN increase the pressure on the Mugabe regime, by recognizing Operation Restore Order as a crime against humanity. Coltart said he further hoped to see the UN Security Council adopt a resolution that would invite the International Criminal Court to investigate the operation. He acknowledged this could be problematic for the U.S. but noted a precedent on Sudan and urged the U.S. not to block such a development were it to occur.

Comment

18. (C) Coltart has asked for neither Embassy nor Department assistance in securing the meeting with the President and we are unable to assess whether his connections are likely to be able to secure an appointment. That said, we believe his message to the President is the right one: the Mugabe regime has weakened itself over the past three months, the chances for real change in the next few years have improved as a result, and the U.S. should continue to maintain its support for democratic elements in Zimbabwe.
DELL